

VZCZCXRO0139
PP RUEHBC RUEHDBU RUEHDE RUEHDIR RUEHKUK
DE RUEHYE #0385/01 0891322
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 301322Z MAR 07
FM AMEMBASSY YEREVAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5198
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 1230
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 0554
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 0294

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 YEREVAN 000385

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/28/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [IR](#) [AJ](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT KOCHARIAN DISCUSSES IRAN, TURKEY, AND
HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT WITH EUR DAS BRYZA

REF: A) STATE 39357 B) YEREVAN 343

Classified By: CDA A.F. Godfrey, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Armenian President Kocharian met for over an hour with EUR DAS Bryza following the funeral of PM Margarian on March 28. On Iran, Kocharian explained that Armenia, in its precarious geopolitical situation, must carefully think through the consequences of every step it takes with its more powerful southern neighbor. Armenia would meet all its legal obligations (UNSCRs, etc), but could not afford confrontation with Tehran. He suggested that the U.S. approach to Iran was more combative than necessary. Kocharian also emphasized how damaging it was that the State Department's Human Rights Report language describing the situation in NK had changed to name Armenia as "occupying" NK. This was taken by local media and commentators as a calculated U.S. broadside, intended to damage President Kocharian, FM Oskanian, and the ruling Republican Party on the eve of elections. Bryza assured that this was not at all our intent, and we were exploring whether we could correct the error. On Turkey, Kocharian and Oskanian revealed their profound skepticism about Turkey's good faith, and their weariness with a process that looks to them designed in Ankara merely to deflect the pressure of world opinion, while never granting Armenia the slightest concrete result. The meeting also featured a Nagorno Karabakh discussion, which will be reported septel. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) A GOOD, LONG TALK: President Kocharian met EUR DAS Bryza March 28, for well over an hour, shortly after the close of funeral ceremonies for the late Prime Minister Andranik Margarian. Kocharian was accompanied by FM Vartan Oskanian and presidential staffer Vigen Sargsian, while Bryza was accompanied by CDA Anthony Godfrey and Pol/Econ chief Steve Banks. The president was animated and gregarious, showing their long acquaintance. Before getting down to other substance, Bryza offered heartfelt sympathies for Margarian's death, and delivered to Kocharian the text of President Bush's condolence letter (Ref A). Participants also discussed Nagorno-Karabakh, which will be reported septel.

IRAN: KOCHARIAN THE CAUTIOUS BARTENDER

13. (C) Bryza explained that the United States was very disappointed that Armenia had chosen to host Iranian President Ahmadinejad on its soil March 19, though we welcomed Armenia's efforts to sharply limit the prominence of the event. Bryza remarked on U.S. chagrin that Armenia had declined to offer a public statement in support of Iran's UNSCR obligations, as we had requested. President Kocharian

recapped his conversation with President Ahmadinejad, as Oskanian had earlier relayed to us (Ref B), and added that Armenia would continue its strong cooperation with the U.S. on non-proliferation. He continued by saying that the United States, as a large and powerful country, perhaps had the luxury of taking a strong stand on issues such as this, even if it could not necessarily see to the final outcome. Armenia, he said, as a small, relatively weak country, and direct neighbor of Iran, did not have this luxury. He must carefully consider each and every policy step, especially on its Iran policy, doing his best to anticipate the consequences of his actions. He affirmed that Armenia would comply with all of its international treaty obligations and the requirements of the UN Security Council, as it had always been careful to do, but preferred to do so quietly. Picking up his water glass, he demonstrated that if his goal were to move the glass from one side of the table to another, he had a choice to either lift it high and slam it down with a great crash, turning heads all around the room to draw attention to what he had done, or he could silently slide it across the tabletop without drawing notice. Kocharian preferred the latter approach in dealing with Iran: to quietly comply with all UNSCR and other obligations, without antagonizing Iran by making a big noise about it.

TURKISH RELATIONS:
A CHURCH BY ANY OTHER NAME...IS INFURIATING

14. (C) Bryza noted that "we have pushed Ankara hard" to make positive gestures to Armenia, which are politically tough for the GOT to make. These gestures may have been halting, incomplete, and sometimes too late (such as the 11th-hour

YEREVAN 00000385 002 OF 003

offer to allow a direct flight), but were nonetheless progress from the Turkish side. Bryza hoped Armenia would recognize and embrace some of these gestures, and help develop momentum in the relationship. Kocharian replied that he had been willing to send his Culture Minister to Van for the Holy Cross Church reopening ceremony on Akdamar Island, but then the controversy had arisen surrounding the GOT's plans for the church. The cross to top the church was one sore point. Kocharian said that Armenia had sent Turkey a suitable cross to go atop the church as a gift, but the GOT had refused to allow any cross to go atop the church. Armenia also objected to the GOT retaining the church as a state museum rather than allowing it to be used as a house of worship. In this context, he felt it necessary to downgrade the Armenian participation to the deputy minister level.

15. (C) Bryza explained how sensitive Turkish politics are at the moment, with the "perfect storm" created by the confluence of the Turkish elections, the U.S. Congressional "genocide" resolution debate, and the U.S. inability to deliver to Turkey's satisfaction on concerns about the PKK in Iraq. Bryza urged Armenia not to rebuff Turkish overtures. He asked what it would take to convince Armenians that there is a real opening on the Turkish side. Kocharian replied--and Oskanian strongly seconded--that, although Armenia would reciprocate positive gestures, the GOAM is tired of the endless cycle of gestures and discussions leading nowhere in its Turkish relationship. What is most important to Armenia, Kocharian said flatly, is the border. Diaspora groups had been pressing him to support passage of the Congressional resolution, but he had refused: "I don't need it," he said. "What I need is the border open and an opportunity to offset the giant trade imbalance with Turkey."

Kocharian said he understood that the United States has many issues and priorities with Turkey, especially related to defense cooperation, the use of Incirlik airbase, and so forth. But this is frankly not Armenia's headache, Kocharian said, despite Armenia's desire to be helpful to the United States.

¶16. (C) Kocharian and Oskanian commented that the sentence added in the latest Human Rights Report that "Armenia continues to occupy the Azerbaijani territory of Nagorno Karabakh and seven surrounding Azerbaijani territories." was highly inflammatory and damaging for the GOAM. He wondered why this language was being added now, in 2007, after so many years of conflict negotiations. Kocharian said this statement was very widely interpreted by local media and political observers as a calculated U.S. swipe against President Kocharian, FM Oskanian, and the ruling Republican Party. These commentators reported that the "real purpose" of the revised wording must have been a U.S. desire to undermine the credibility of the ruling Republican Party for the May 12 elections. Local observers were convinced there must be an ulterior agenda of this sort, because otherwise why, in 2007, would the United States reformulate its description of the NK conflict after so many years? Calling the new language "outrageous," FM Oskanian said it goes against Armenia's fundamental policy on Nagorno Karabakh, and everything they had worked for these past fifteen years to affirm that Nagorno Karabakh is a self-governing entity, not an arm of the Armenian government. Oskanian said this was the most damaging single sentence ever written during the last fifteen years to his position as foreign minister and as an NK negotiator. (NOTE: In a previous meeting with us Oskanian had made explicit the point that he found the sentence so devastating because it undermined the very delicate arrangement under which "Nagorno Karabakh Republic" (or "NKR") officials allowed the GOAM to negotiate on the "NKR's" behalf--as Azerbaijan insisted. Now Armenia's position as an intermediary was being turned against the GOAM, with the allegation that Armenia was a hostile occupying power controlling NK. END NOTE)

¶17. (C) Bryza took on board Kocharian's protest, expressed regret for the counter-productive effect it was having in Armenia, and assured Kocharian that there was no hidden political agenda. He pledged to work to correct the text.

¶18. (C) Kocharian took the opportunity to question the credibility and reliability of the entire human rights report, alleging that 60 percent or more of the facts reported were mistaken, in his opinion. CDA pushed back, noting while we

YEREVAN 00000385 003 OF 003

understand the president's anger and concede that that one sentence was poorly chosen, we stand behind the factual reporting of the human rights report, and had taken pains--including significant, ongoing consultation with relevant GOAM officials--to be accurate in our findings. CDA urged the GOAM to take the report seriously as sound work overall. Kocharian barely took note of this pushback; he barely paused in his animated and lengthy expounding of his complaint to allow the U.S. side to get a word in on this subject.

¶19. (U) DAS Bryza did not have the opportunity to clear on this cable prior to his departure.

GODFREY